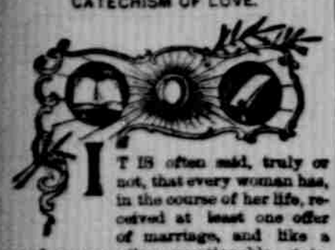
CATECHISM OF LOVE.



IT IS often said, truly or not, that every woman has, in the course of her life, received at least one offer of marriage, and like a good many other questionable statements this one is often accepted as truth because of its frequent assertion.

But is it true, and how or we to determine whether it is true or not? Suppose we petition the legislature for a law compelling every woman to veraciously answer some such catechism as this:

1. Did you ever have an offer of marriage?
2. What was the form and mode in which it was made?
3. Did your refuse or accept?
4. Why?

Really it does not seem to me more impertinent to ask such questions than those which men with books and pencils and an abrupt manner are legally empowered to ask all the time from house to house.

In the time of the war they asked every housekeeper how many spoons and forks she had, and how much they weighed. I have myself been obliged to declare the value of my personal jewelry and ornaments, not to mention impertinent questions of custom house officers.

So really it would be nothing more personal to ask the four little questions I have suggested, and only think what a fund of useful and entertaining history would thus be opened up; also what valuable hints to men, maids and widows upon the best and most effectual mode of conducting their little operations.

If these reports could be printed and put into general circulation, do but fancy the revolution that would take place founded upon positive data instead of vague theory. A man about to propose goes to the city or town library and asks for the last edition of "Offers of Marriage" for New York state or Maine or California or Wisconsin, as the case may be. There it stands, alongside of the directory, the census report, the "Solid Men of Gotham," and the other works for which people pay so much money in order that they may gain a little knowledge of their neighbor's affairs, and our lover or suitor sits down to his morning's labor. After reading some three or four hundred cases, with especial reference to queries two and four, he turns to the tabulated totals at the end of the book and deeply meditates over the style of proposal most often successful, and the reasons why certain other styles did not succeed.

Two hundred and sixty-four thousand men were refused between the months of January and December, 1891. Of these seventy-eight used an identical form in making their offer; in fact, so identical a form as to suggest that it was taken out of some manual like—

"Courting Made Easy,"
"How to Woo a Widow,"
"Forty Methods of Popping the Question,"
"Nothing Venture, Nothing Have," or
"The Handbook of Courtship."

Of course the student makes a memorandum, mental or in his notebook, that he will on no account go about his errand in that style. Then he studies the successful cases, but here finds a most bewildering variety, and selecting a few specimens he turns to the cases referred to, as, for instance, when among the successful offers he reads:

"Put it on if you want it," and turning to the case reads:

"Mary Jones, born Mary Smith, states that she has only received one offer of marriage. This was from Samuel Jones, who calling upon her one evening, took a ring—gold band set with three imitation pearls—out of his waistcoat pocket and showing it to her said: 'See here, this is an engagement ring.' Deponent replied: 'Well, what of it?'

"Whereupon Jones handed it to her, saying, 'Put it on if you want it,' which was, as she considers, his offer. She accepted because she wanted to marry somebody, and liked him as well as anybody else."

Finding this form a little crude our student reads the next report, which runs thus:

"Birdie Bowers, born Birdie Lovering, states that she has received 'forty-leven' offers, and would repeat as many of them as the auditor cared to hear, but that Toffy, as she calls her husband, only said:

"'Itty Birdie want to be Toffy's ownie Birdie? Div him tweety tweety tiss, den.'

"She accepted him because he was the cunningest old darling she ever saw, and she loves him dearly."

"That's a little too soft for me," comments the student, and tries another.

"Kate March, born Kate Burr, says she will go to prison for contempt of court or pay a fine or anything else the auditor has power to inflict, but as for going back on the men she has refused, she won't do it. The only offer she ever accepted was Tom March's, and the way he made it was in driving, when he said:

"'Don't you think, Kate, you and I might drive pleasantly in double harness?' to which she replied:

"'I dare say, if you didn't undertake to make it a tandem team, with your own horse on the lead.' And they were engaged. She accepted him because she liked him."

"Too horsey for me," remarks the student, and tries another.

"Angela Loftus, born Angela Airey, says she had two offers. The first was from Tom March, who said, when she had been singing 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' to him one Sunday evening:

"'Say, Angie, let me drive that sweet chariot, and you go passenger?' Angie thought this irreverent and said no, but she did not suppose she was going to drive the poor man to despair and make him marry Kate Burr, as he did, in three weeks. As for Mr. Loftus, he was her clergyman, and when she knew that Tom was engaged she felt so sorry and afraid that she had done wrong that she went to her clergy about it, and he took her by the hand and said:

"'Angelina, you are worthy of a higher destiny than to marry Tom March. Be the partner of my soul, Angelina.'

"And she said she would, because she thought it right to do as her minister said."

Next comes—

"Elizabeth B. Bullion, born Elizabeth Tattersall. Had no other real offer except her husband's, but was expecting every day that Arthur Montague, a gentleman on the stage, would offer himself. One day, however, Mr. Bullion called to see her and said:

"'I have come on the 5:30 train and ought to return by the noon train to take up a note for $10,000 which otherwise will go to protest. I have left myself just an hour and a half in which to become engaged to you, and I have brought this ring on approbation. It is worth as much as the note, and if it is not returned to the jeweler today he will not take it. Now it remains with you to lose me $30,000 or to save it, for I shan't take the noon train unless I leave the ring on your engagement finger.'

"'Of course,' pursues Mrs. Bullion, 'I didn't want to make the man lose $30,000, so I slipped the ring on my finger and he went back on the noon train.'"

Pursuing his researches our student finds that one gentleman remarked that he had for a long time felt himself to be a stray half of a pair of scissors, but recognized the lady addressed as the other half.

Another suitor invited his chosen one to drive, and asked her if she had any prejudice against fried onions, and upon her assuring him that she had not, he confessed that his favorite dish was beefsteak smothered in onions and wound up by saying:

"And if you'll see that I get it five mornings in the week for breakfast at 8 sharp, we'll buy a barrel of onions tomorrow."

Seventeen widowers, in slightly varying forms, are found to base their offer upon the need of some one to look after their "motherless little ones;" all seventeen used that exact phrase, and I have noticed widowers usually do. Also, I have occasionally wondered why "motherless little ones" is considered so "fetching," while "motherless young ones" would be quite the contrary.

Two doctors confessed that they would get more and better practice as married than as single men, while one clergyman who had cherished thoughts of celibacy makes the startling announcement that "the world, the flesh and the devil have conquered my better nature and you must become my wife."

It is pleasant to note that the young lady responded that she did not wish to go into the firm whose style he had quoted, and should by no manner of means become his wife. Shortly after, the same sensible girl received an offer from a young man who told her that she showed herself so good a daughter that he was sure she would be a good wife, and wanted her for *his* wife. Him she accepted because she thought he would make such a good son-in-law.

It is recorded of one couple, that having gone with a party from one city to another to pass an evening at the theater, they lost the last train home and were obliged to spend the night at a hotel. There being no married lady in the party it was proposed that one of the girls should get married and so matronize the rest; lots were drawn to decide which of the young men should become a benedict, and he who drew the longest straw stepped up to a girl he had been introduced to some three weeks before, and said:

"You and I might as well be the victims, Sally."

Sally assented, a justice of the peace tied the knot between two sleepy yawns and Sally *matronized* the party.

If you think that story too extravagant I will assure you that Sally told it to me herself, and added that "her folks were real provoked" about it, and she rather thought Jim and she would go through the court and make another start, for he hadn't any way to support her and had a real ugly temper.

Closing our big blue book, we look into our own experiences, we women, and mentally smile as we rehearse the forms and methods in which men have made known to us the fact that they wished to marry us, for I take it for granted that most of us have received at least that "one offer," whether we accepted it or not.

My own impression is that the most effective offers are the most unrepeatable, consisting more of looks, half sentences, significant pauses, a timely gesture, a half suppliant, half peremptory caress, which if accepted seals the bargain, and if rejected carries with it a rejection *in toto*.

Of course most American women have heard more domestic than foreign offers of marriage, and certainly men's manners differ as much in this as in any other national custom. The American and the Englishman sincerely respect woman. They perceive that her mental and moral powers, if not identical with their own, are quite as important to the common weal; they consider that in offering marriage they ask for fellowship and intelligent sympathy, and an added strength and power in their lives; while the Continental, the Italian, the Frenchman or Spaniard prostrates himself in extravagant homage at the feet of the woman he would win, and when once she is won treats her as a toy, a slave or an irresponsible child, to be petted, governed and suspiciously watched, but never trusted with affairs of importance.

It is calculated that it would take a person over 300 years to read all the standard works that are published, and yet we seldom come across a man who will acknowledge that he has not read every one.

Cyrus Thompson claims to have discovered the key which will unlock the mystery of the Maya codices and probably of the Central American inscriptions.